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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000007

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [DJ](#) [ER](#) [UNSC](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: FONMIN AND CHOD ON IMPACT OF SANCTIONS ON ERITREA

REF: 09 STATE 130359; 10 DJIBOUTI 03; 09 ASMARA 440; 09 DJIBOUTI 649
09 DJIBOUTI 1407

CLASSIFIED BY: James Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(A), (B), (D)

1.(C) Summary: In separate conversations with Foreign Minister Mahmoud Ali Youssouf (Jan 4) and Chief of Defense Staff Major General Fathi Houssein (Jan 7), both were effusive in their thanks for USG support for UNSCR 1907, which imposes sanctions on Eritrea (Ref A). Youssouf expressed confidence that the measures would influence Eritrean behavior and cause President Isaias to curtail his destabilizing actions in the region. Fathi was more worried that Isaias would try to strike back - not in a conventional attack on Djibouti, but by increasing efforts to infiltrate Djiboutian territory with armed Afar (the predominant ethnic group in the north). To guard against this threat, the Djiboutian army has sent its sole Afar flag-rank officer to oversee increased patrols in the border area. End summary.

12. (SBU) Djiboutian officials are pleased with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1907, which sanctions Eritrea for its destabilizing role in Somalia as well as its failure to comply with UNSCR 1862 regarding the Djibouti/Eritrea border dispute. The Djiboutians are also grateful for the active U.S. support for the resolution. Djiboutian media have devoted extensive positive coverage to the resolution. The Foreign Minister issued a statement welcoming the UNSCR the day it was adopted in New York; state-run media published favorable editorials; and President Ismael Omar Guelleh gave the border situation (and UNSCR) lengthy comment in his New Year's address.

FONMIN Optimistic UNSCR Will Influence Isaias

13. (C) In a meeting on January 4 (other topics covered Ref B) Foreign Minister Youssouf thanked Ambassador for USG support for the resolution and expressed confidence that it would influence GSE President Isaias Afeworki's behavior. Youssouf remarked that "Isaias is crazy but not suicidal," quoting an observation he said had been made to him by Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles, based on his years of experience with the Eritrean leader. Isaias will react to pressure, the Foreign Minister asserted. In Youssouf's analysis, Isaias has few options other than to dial back his destabilizing role in the region. He lacks significant foreign support and, Youssouf argued, Isaias's main patron Qatar is likely to reconsider its assistance in light of the UNSCR. Unlike other countries able to flout international sanctions -- Youssouf gave Iran as an example - the GSE has few resources to draw on and

little popular backing within the country. Already, Isaias's public statements show that the UNSCR action has gotten his attention, and forced him to acknowledge the Djibouti/Eritrea border conflict which the GSE had long denied. While admitting Eritrean opposition groups already fear that Isaias will lash out in response to the UNSCR, Youssouf said he expected instead that Isaias would quietly adjust his behavior in order to avoid more draconian international sanctions that could threaten his hold on power. (Comment: We report this as the Djiboutian Foreign Minister's perspective, but, obviously, defer to Embassy Asmara's assessment of the likely impact of sanctions (e.g., Ref C). End Comment.)

CHOD Mobilizes Show of Force in Border Area

14. (C) In a separate meeting January 7, Djiboutian Armed Forces (FAD) Chief of Defense Staff MG Fathi Houssein also expressed appreciation for USG support for UNSCR 1907. Fathi registered his concern, however, that Isaias would now strike back in response to the sanctions. While discounting the possibility of a conventional

DJIBOUTI 00000007 002 OF 002

attack on Djibouti, Fathi feared a potential increase in GSE support for infiltration of armed Afar into northern Djibouti to carry out small-scale attacks, such as the multiple mine incidents noted over the past year (Ref D). Increased patrols along the border and other "show-of-force" measures by the FAD in the past two weeks are intended to pre-empt any such action -- and to reassure the local inhabitants of the government's determination to protect them. Elders from the region had made an explicit request to President Ismael Omar Guelleh for such protection, Fathi said. The CHOD added that this FAD show of force is being led by Brigadier General Hassan Ali, the only ethnic Afar among Djibouti's four flag-rank officers. The decision to send an Afar commander is intended to mitigate any negative local sentiment concerning deployment of the FAD's largely ethnic Somali forces to the north, Fathi explained.

15. (C) On a recent visit to the border area, we learned that approximately 1,500 FAD forces remain deployed along the frontier (Ref E). While Fathi did not indicate that any additional forces had been deployed, we observed on December 30 a convoy of more than 20 military vehicles -- troop transport trucks, HUMVEES, and other vehicles -- headed north on the main highway through Djibouti's northern Tadjourah region.

Comment

16. (C) The GODJ is pleased with UNSCR 1907 and takes pride in its diplomatic success in securing sanctions against Eritrea. While hopeful that the sanctions will influence Isaias's behavior, the GODJ is also focused on immediate remaining risks, especially Eritrean infiltration or other "indirect approaches" that would threaten Djibouti.

SWAN